

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

THE RHETORIC AND REALITY OF COMMAND:  
A LEADERSHIP ANALYSIS

*by*

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## **Biography**

Lieutenant Colonel Santoro was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and was commissioned through the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps in June 1988, entering the Air Force as an aircraft maintenance officer in March 1989. He subsequently attended pilot training and has had a variety of assignments as a pilot, instructor pilot, and evaluator pilot in the C-130, as well as a staff tour at Headquarters Pacific Air Forces, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. He also commanded the 816th Global Mobility Readiness Squadron, McGuire Air Force Base, N.J., the Air Force's first-ever GMRS, leading the unit from initial to full operational capability. A command pilot with over 2,800 flying hours, including 155 combat hours, he is a veteran of Operations PROVIDE PROMISE, JOINT ENDEAVOR, and IRAQI FREEDOM. Lieutenant Colonel Santoro holds a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Drexel University and a master's degree in mechanical engineering from Boston University.

## Introduction

“You’re the commander—get out and lead!”<sup>1</sup> – Gen (retired) John L. Piotrowski, USAF

The prevailing perception of squadron command tends to highlight the classical view of the commander’s role as a leader. When people envision the day they’ll take command, their thoughts often drift to how they will implement their vision, inspiring their people to successfully accomplish the mission. This timeless picture of the commander as the heroic leader is continually reinforced through an endless collection of leadership literature. Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1-1, *Leadership and Force Development* drives the commander’s focus by identifying mission and people as the fundamental elements of leadership: “The leader’s primary responsibility is to motivate and direct people to carry out the unit’s mission successfully.”<sup>2</sup>

While almost no one would argue against these ideals of leadership, another aspect of command is often ignored. In executing these responsibilities there is a significant administrative burden with which the commander must contend. Much is due to the myriad of commander’s programs and stovepipe functional initiatives that continually add to the commander’s plate. While all organizations need administrative processes, it seems intuitive there is an impact on the commander’s ability to serve as a leader. How much time do these functions take away from commanders’ attention on mission and people?

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<sup>1</sup> Gen John L. Piotrowski, “A Perspective on Effective Leadership.” Air University (AU) Document 24, *Concepts for Air Force Leadership*, 515. Gen Piotrowski was formerly the Commander, North American Aerospace Defense Command and United States Space Command.

<sup>2</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1-1, *Leadership and Force Development*, 1.

In August 2007, a B-52 flew from Minot Air Force Base (AFB), North Dakota to Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, inadvertently loaded with six missiles containing actual nuclear warheads.<sup>3</sup> This incident led to inquiries into the Air Force's nuclear enterprise and multiple commanders lost their jobs. One investigation was conducted by the Secretary of Defense Task Force on Department of Defense Nuclear Weapons Management chaired by James Schlesinger. The task force identified many underlying issues, and while it was just one factor, their September 2008 report specifically cited "the removal of all personnelists from squadron-level organizations has imposed a significant administrative burden on unit commanders. The workload once shouldered by dedicated personnel assigned to each unit must now be accomplished by leadership and competes with the nuclear mission for attention, adding additional risk."<sup>4</sup> There is perhaps no more alarming example administrative functions are impacting commanders' ability to keep their eye on the ball.

The purpose of this study is to investigate what commanders really do—that is, what activities actually consume a commander's time. Initially, this effort involves the Air Force's expectations of the focus of squadron commander activities, developed by reviewing Air Force leadership doctrine and other guidance. Next, the study will examine some initiatives that grew out of Program Budget Decision 720 and have contributed to commanders' administrative burden. A methodology to analyze activities that consume commanders' time will then be developed based on Henry Mintzberg's seminal work "The Nature of Managerial Work." With Mintzberg's study as a framework, a survey will be created to collect data to provide insight into and allow for analysis of commanders' activities. Finally, recommendations will be presented for protecting commanders' most precious commodity—time.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Hoffman, "Nuclear Safety Slipped for Years Before Minot." *Air Force Times*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> James R. Schlesinger, et al, *Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management*, 42.

## **Background**

There are many aspects of leadership, but command is unique in that the authorities vested in commanders go well beyond those of civilian leaders. There is no civilian equivalent for ordering men into battle or taking Uniform Code of Military Justice actions against those who do not meet standards. The perspective of the commander as a heroic leader predominates in military culture. Where does it come from? Air Force guidance perpetuates that picture, but do senior leaders contradict themselves with initiatives that add to the commander's ever-increasing administrative burden?

### **Air Force Expectations of Command**

Many sources offer senior leaders' perspective on expectations of squadron command, but to provide scope, this study is limited to reviewing Air Force leadership doctrine and other Air Force publications. As mentioned, our most current leadership doctrine places commanders' focus squarely on mission and people. However, an interesting aspect of AFDD 1-1 is how little of it actually centers on commander responsibilities. It mentions "Leadership does not equal command, but all commanders should be leaders,"<sup>5</sup> but the document dwells at a much higher level, presenting general elements of leadership, with almost no discussion of specific responsibilities. According to Mr. Robert Christensen, AFDD 1-1 point of contact at the LeMay Center for Doctrine, it was determined command is such a policy driven aspect of leadership it should not play a major role in doctrine. The next iteration, AFDD 1-0, is projected to address some command responsibilities, but will not provide an extended discussion of command separate from leadership.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1-1, *Leadership and Force Development*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen J. Miller, Maj Gen, USAF, Memorandum For Record: "Program Directive for AFDD 1-0, Leadership and Force Development", 2. AFDD 1-1 is being re-designated as 1-0 to correlate with joint doctrine.



Historically, Air Force doctrine placed greater emphasis on command responsibilities. The first leadership doctrine document, Air Force Manual (AFM) 35-15, *Air Force Leadership*, published in 1948, concentrated more heavily on the concept of command. Chapter 4, *Responsibility of Command*, specifically addresses commanders' responsibilities. It highlights the primacy of mission—"...the common denominator for your entire effort—THE MISSION," while discussion of taking care of people falls below responsibilities to higher headquarters and collateral units.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Chapter 4 contains sections on administrative and management responsibilities and clearly states "You are responsible for efficient administration of your unit."<sup>8</sup>

AFM 50-3, *Air Force Leadership*, appeared in 1964 and was primarily a rehash of its predecessor, with updated vignettes and more focus on the nuclear and space missions. In some aspects it infers the need for more business-like leadership, stating the "professional officer of today must develop more and more skills and orientations common to civilian administrators and leaders."<sup>9</sup> But much of AFM 50-3 is verbatim to AFM 35-15 and was, in effect, the last update to leadership doctrine until 2004's AFDD 1-1. Meanwhile, Air Force Pamphlet (AFP) 35-49, *Air Force Leadership*, though not formal doctrine, put the spotlight clearly on mission and people as the fundamental elements of leadership. Published in 1985, AFP 35-49 discusses leadership in general and hardly mentions command; it seems to have been the basis for AFDD 1-1.

Along with formal doctrine, the Air Force produces other guidance for leaders, primarily under the auspices of Air University (AU). AU-24, *Concepts for Air Force Leadership* provides

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<sup>7</sup> Air Force Manual (AFM) 35-15, *Air Force Leadership*, 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 13. AFM 35-15 also contains a short checklist for the responsibility of command in Annex A.

<sup>9</sup> Air Force Manual (AFM) 50-3, *Air Force Leadership*, 3.

over 100 vignettes on leadership, yet very few directly address command.<sup>10</sup> While AU-24 approaches leadership from a general perspective, AU Press publishes three books specifically on command responsibilities. AU-2, *Guidelines for Command* is an excellent resource on over 100 different aspects of command ranging from taking command, leading and developing Airmen, commander's programs, standards and discipline, Airmen and family assistance, and others. *Commanding an Air Force Squadron in the Twenty-First Century*, by Jeffry F. Smith and *Sharing Success—Owning Failure: Preparing to Command in the Twenty-First Century*, by David L. Goldfein, provide a wealth of information on topics germane to command. While these products clearly hint at the administrative burden awaiting commanders, the underlying theme that comes through loud and clear is mission and people. Former Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF) Gen T. Michael Moseley sets the tone in AU-2: "Command is about accomplishing the mission and taking care of your Airmen."<sup>11</sup>

Of all the advice in these resources, one tenet that appears repeatedly is the need for "leadership by walking around." In AU-2, Gen Moseley asserts, "It is essential to get out of your office and connect with your Airmen wherever their duties take them."<sup>12</sup> In Smith's book, former CSAF Gen John P. Jumper declares, "Leadership is not accomplished from behind the desk or by way of E-mail; rather, effective leadership requires you to lead from out front."<sup>13</sup> No doubt, 100 percent of commanders would agree, and the number of times this precept appears in

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<sup>10</sup> In AU-24, Gen (retired) Michael Loh ("The Responsibility of Leadership in Command") provides a number of application principles that tend toward heroic leader actions and Gen (retired) John L. Piotrowski ("A Perspective on Effective Leadership") provides similar broad counsel, but very few articles address command specifically or the administrative burden commanders face. Gen (retired) Bryce Poe II ("Leadership as a Function of Experience") offers this interesting insight: "I sometimes feel that we are a bit embarrassed to equate 'leadership' with the routine, the matter of course, the customary. This is a pity, since it is by a commander's performance in such matters that he is often most judged by both superiors and subordinates."

<sup>11</sup> *Air University (AU) Handbook 2, Guidelines for Command: A Handbook on the Leadership of Airmen for Air Force Squadron Commanders*, vii.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffry F. Smith, *Commanding an Air Force Squadron in the Twenty-First Century*, vii.

print leads one to believe it should take the preponderance of commanders' time. But is this reality? As Smith mentions, there are "many pulls on a squadron commander's time during the day," although he says most units have administrative personnel to aid the commander with time-draining tasks.<sup>14</sup> Do commanders have sufficient staffs, allowing them to focus on mission and people and to lead from the front?

### **Program Budget Decision (PBD) 720**

In December 2005 the Air Force produced PBD 720, the basis for a Congress-approved program to use projected savings from reduced manpower authorizations and aircraft retirements to finance recapitalization and modernization of aircraft, missile, and space systems. The goal: reduce the force by 40,000 Airmen over three years (to an end-strength of 315,000 by FY09) and reinvest the expected six billion dollars in savings into the recapitalization effort.<sup>15</sup> In a 2007 statement to Congress, then Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne and Gen Moseley foreshadowed the unit-level impact: "...commanders are assessing how they can operate base support functions more efficiently given fewer resources. Inevitably, commanders may be required to consolidate capabilities on some bases to maintain services to our people."<sup>16</sup>

Because leadership believed information technologies could be leveraged to automate administrative functions, career fields such as finance, personnel, and information management experienced large cuts under PBD 720. To meet those mandated cuts, functionals implemented stovepipe initiatives to make up for lost manpower, such as the Base Level Service Delivery Model (BLSDM), the personnel community's reaction to a 39 percent force reduction. BLSDM resulted in removal of Commander's Support Staff (CSS) personnel from most squadrons and

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<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey F. Smith, *Commanding an Air Force Squadron in the Twenty-First Century*, 119.

<sup>15</sup> "Force Shaping— Explaining the Numbers," *Roll Call*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> , Michael W. Wynne and Gen T. Michael Moseley, *Department of the Air Force Presentation to the Armed Services Committee United States House of Representatives*, 4.

consolidation of the majority of those authorizations within the Military Personnel Element (MPE) of Force Support Squadrons. The expectation was most personnel tasks previously completed by the CSS would be accomplished by the MPE. Plus, commanders would now have to retrieve personnel products and conduct other actions via the “Commander’s Dashboard,” an information technology (IT) tool, with full implementation expected by mid-2009.<sup>17</sup>

BLSDM and other stovepipe initiatives were implemented without true understanding of the impact on squadrons or commanders. Blow back from the field was almost immediate. At a January 2008 conference at Andrews AFB, Maryland, commanders and first sergeants “provided outspoken feedback in areas such as administrative support” to Gen Moseley.<sup>18</sup> Besides the lack of personnel/administrative support, a second-order effect had not been considered. As CMSgt Jerry Plohocky of the Air Force Material Command A1 staff stated, “Over the years CSS personnel have taken on additional duties inherent to command positions that were not core personnel duties. While these are often important tasks, the fact remains that with the recent manpower cuts, the personnel career field can no longer support these additional duties.”<sup>19</sup> Many of these tasks would now fall directly on commanders or personnel pulled from core mission duties. According to senior leaders, “new technologies allow one Airman to do the work of many Airmen.”<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, it appears that one Airman was the squadron commander.

Senior leadership is well aware of the problem. In 2008, Gen Moseley commissioned his Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel, and Services (AF/A1) to study the numerous strains on Airmen’s time. The Plans and Integration Directorate (AF/A1X) led the Airmen’s Time Assessment team on ten base visits in August 2008 to investigate programs, duties and

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<sup>17</sup> Capt Bob Everdeen, “Workforce Cuts Drive Shift in Personnel Services Delivery,” *Air Force Print News*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> “Squadron Commanders, First Sergeants Meet Senior Leaders,” *Air Force Print News*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Capt Bob Everdeen, “Workforce Cuts Drive Shift in Personnel Services Delivery,” *Air Force Print News*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> “PBD 720 and Force Shaping,” *Roll Call*, 1.

issues usurping commanders' and Airmen's time. The findings were not surprising. According to the team, "The centralization of information managers and personnelists unveiled a significant amount of administrative workload with managing squadron programs. The absorption of this workload has impacted squadron leadership's ability to lead/mentor..."<sup>21</sup> The report noted despite the loss of personnel under PBD 720, there was no reduction in mission or additional duty requirements, and commanders were concerned their ability to "lead by walking around" was adversely impacted. One recommendation clearly showed the effect on commanders' time: "...we likely need to consider manpower solutions to enable commanders to regain the considerable time they currently spend tracking and following up on personnel and administrative matters."<sup>22</sup>

AF/A1X conducted a follow-up study in August 2009 and found many of the same concerns still existed. The October 2009 report cited IT solutions such as the Commander's Dashboard were not providing expected efficiencies and recommended a study of CSS workload to "measure and document workload left behind after the respective centralization/transformation efforts and now being accomplished by commanders, first sergeants, etc."<sup>23</sup> The report noted 71 Air Force-directed additional duties are levied on commanders and their units.<sup>24</sup> In addition to base visits, AF/A1X conducted surveys on programs taking time from primary duties for commanders, first sergeants, superintendents, and Airmen. Results appear in Figure 1:

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<sup>21</sup> *Airmen's Time Assessment Team After Action Report*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *2009 Airmen's Time Assessment (ATA) After Action Report*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

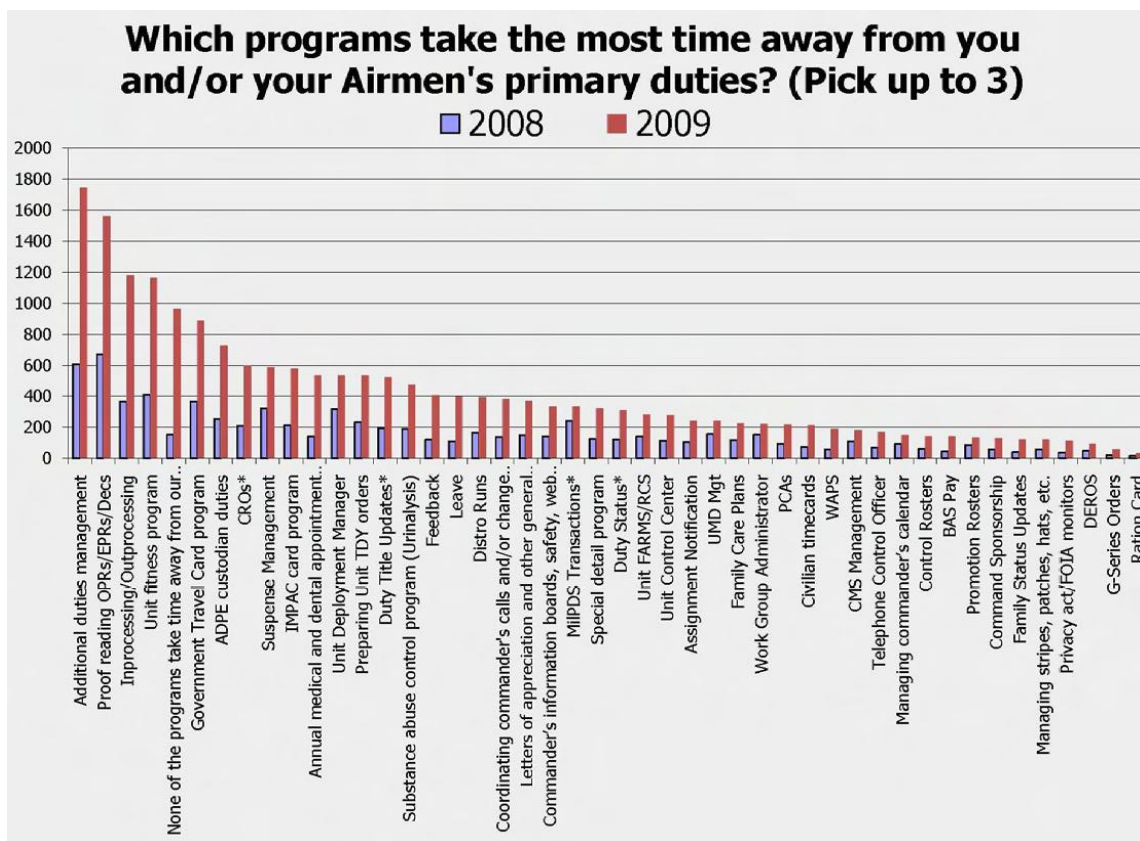


Figure 1: Combined Airmen's Time Assessment Survey results for 2008 and 2009<sup>25</sup>

While these data are telling, it does not provide a true picture of the impact on commanders and first sergeants, because most survey respondents did not fall in these categories.<sup>26</sup> To gain more insight into commanders' time, a more focused study is required.

<sup>25</sup> 2009 Airmen's Time Assessment (ATA) After Action Report, 25.

<sup>26</sup> The 2008 survey had 1,784 participants (*Airmen's Time Assessment Team After Action Report*, 24), but only 30 percent were at the commander/director level and only 9.4 percent were first sergeants (*Airmen's Time Survey*, 5). The 2009 survey was wider in scope with 5,836 respondents, but even less representative of the impact on squadron leadership because only eight percent of respondents were commanders and only two percent were first sergeants. (*2009 Airmen's Time Assessment (ATA) After Action Report*, 24).

## Methodology

In order to develop a more meaningful perspective of the activities that dominate a squadron commander's attention, a methodology had to be developed. To provide a theoretical basis for the effort, Henry Mintzberg's managerial study was used as a framework to build a survey instrument to collect data from graduated squadron commanders. The goal was to investigate from several aspects what commanders really do—that is, what activities actually consume a commander's time.

### Henry Mintzberg: “The Nature of Managerial Work”

In 1973, Henry Mintzberg published “The Nature of Managerial Work” based on his 1968 doctoral work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The genesis of his dissertation was a simple question he asked as a six-year old imagining what his father did at the office<sup>27</sup>—“what do managers do?”<sup>28</sup> This query grew into a complex study of the roles managers fill and the activities that constitute their work. In Mintzberg's mind, if one did not know exactly the activities that consume a manager's time, “how can we design useful management information systems or planning systems for him? If we do not know what managers do how can we claim to teach management to students in business schools?”<sup>29</sup>

While there are many descriptions, Mintzberg defined the manager as “that person in charge of a formal organization or one of its subunits,” which means the individual has formal authority over his organization, much as a military commander.<sup>30</sup> Five chief executive officers (CEOs) who presided over large and successful organizations in very different fields of endeavor

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, viii. Mintzberg's dissertation was entitled “The Manager at Work—Determining his Activities, Roles, and Programs by Structured Observation.”

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

were the subjects of his study.<sup>31</sup> Mintzberg chose structured observation as his methodology because it offered a blend of open-ended observation with the rigorous systematic recording of structured data. It allowed for the characterization of each observed event with the flexibility to develop the categories both during and after the observation.<sup>32</sup> Mintzberg shadowed each CEO for one week, recording their every activity. He broke out his observations into three records: the chronology record (activity patterns); the mail record (incoming and outgoing correspondence); and the contact record (every verbal contact for the CEO).<sup>33</sup>

The chronology record provides the most useful framework for studying commander's activities, so those results are presented here. After scrutinizing his data, Mintzberg determined managers' activities could be broken into five categories: desk work, telephone calls, scheduled meetings, unscheduled meetings, and tours. Desk work refers to the time spent doing work in the office, while telephone calls were categorized separately and are self-explanatory. Scheduled meetings consisted of formal meetings or ceremonial events while unscheduled meetings were impromptu gatherings or "drop-ins." Tours were random observation without prearrangement; in more familiar terms: "leadership by walking around."<sup>34</sup> Figure 2 depicts Mintzberg's findings on the distribution of the manager's time:

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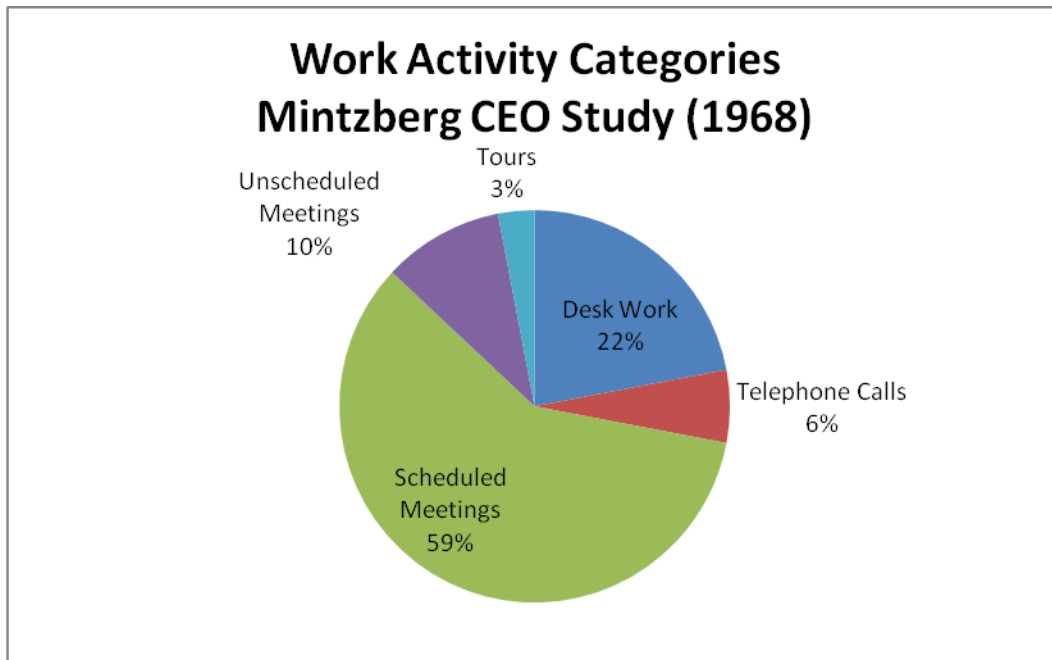
<sup>31</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, 239-240.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.





**Figure 2: Manager's Time Distribution within the Chronology Record Work Activity Categories from Henry Mintzberg's "The Nature of Managerial Work."<sup>35</sup>**

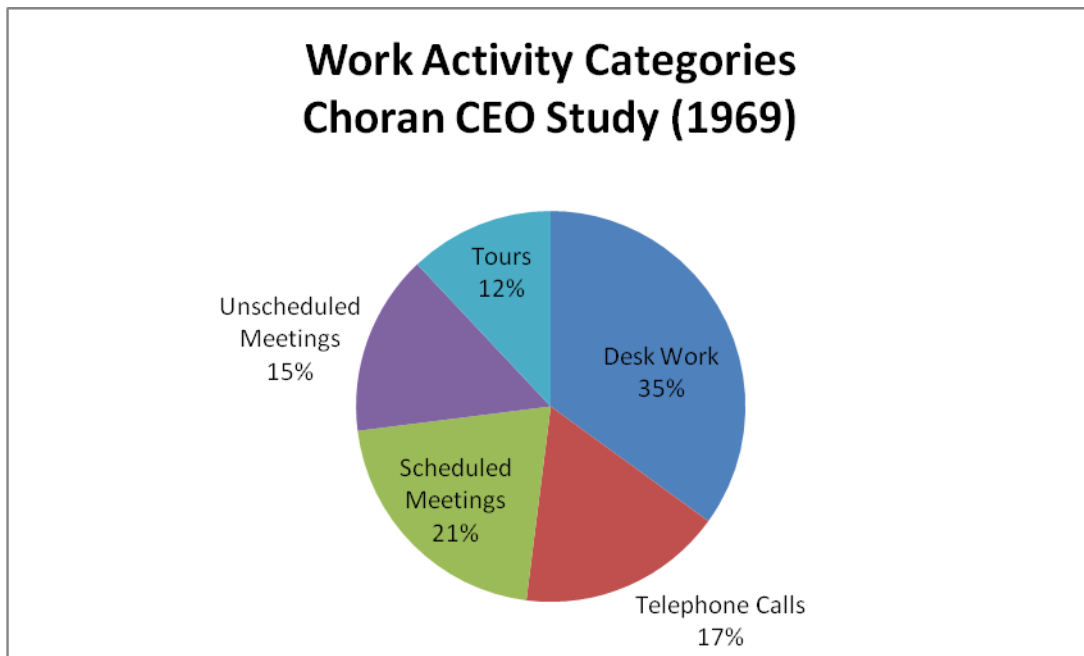
The two extremes are probably the most notable of these results. While 59 percent of the CEOs' time was spent in scheduled meetings, this becomes less surprising when one considers that managers of large organizations are strategic level leaders. These events provide CEOs opportunities to meet with large groups of people both inside and outside the organization. In regard to tours, Mintzberg noted although the CEOs were well aware of the value of the activity in discovering a wealth of information about the organization, "the surprising feature about this powerful tool is that it is used so infrequently," accounting for only three percent of the CEOs' time.<sup>36</sup>

In an intriguing comparison, Mintzberg cited Irving Chorán's 1969 study that mirrored his own methodology. Chorán observed three presidents of small companies for two days each. These results (presented in Figure 3) are likely more representative of a commander's time study

<sup>35</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, 105.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

because as Mintzberg highlights, leaders of small organizations “engage in fewer formal activities but are much more concerned with the operating work of their organizations.”<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 3: Manager’s Time Distribution within the Chronology Record Work Activity Categories from Irving Choran’s Study.**<sup>38</sup>

Only a portion of Mintzberg’s quest to discover what managers really do is presented, and not all of his work is applicable to the task at hand. But in his observation that the manager’s “work pace is unrelenting and his work activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation,”<sup>39</sup> Mintzberg could easily have been describing the squadron commander’s job. Thus, his study provides an excellent starting point to design a methodology to investigate the activities that consume a commander’s time.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, 104. While Mintzberg does not define the size of these organizations, one can infer they were closer in dimension to an Air Force squadron than those in Mintzberg’s work.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

## **Development of the Commander's Time Survey**

A structured observation study would be the most accurate method to record and categorize activities that consume a commander's time. However, resource and time constraints precluded such a study so a survey instrument was developed. While Mintzberg felt surveys were not the best tool for this type of work because of evidence that managers are not always effective at estimating their own activities, he did believe they were useful in examining "managers' perceptions of their own jobs."<sup>40</sup> The survey was created in conjunction with the Office of Program Assessment (ESS/XA) at the Spaatz Center for Officer Education at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. The target audience was 105 active duty Air Force graduated squadron commanders within the 2010 Air War College (AWC) class. The AWC commander approved the survey and its distribution and it was administered by ESS/XA from 29 October to 10 November 2009 via a targeted e-mail providing a hyperlink to the web-based instrument. Responses were confidential and the researcher had no access to any personal information. The survey appears in Appendix A.

The initial portion of the survey collected preliminary data on the nature of the commander's squadron. In addition, commanders were requested to base their responses on a typical work week in garrison and to provide how many hours they worked in an average week to allow for percentage answers to be converted into hours. Because a commander's job is so complex, there are a myriad of angles from which data on activities could be collected. To provide scope, the survey was limited to three perspectives of the use of commanders' time. The first major section of the survey mirrored Mintzberg's five work activity categories: desk work, telephone calls, scheduled meetings, unscheduled meetings, and tours. However, an additional category was added to account for specific personal training required to maintain mission

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, 222.

capabilities or currency requirements (for example, a pilot flying training sorties) for which no civilian equivalent exists in Mintzberg's work.

The survey's second section was designed to examine commanders' work from the perspective of the two fundamental doctrinal elements of Air Force leadership, mission and people, along with the often ignored administrative aspect of the job. Commanders were asked to indicate via percentage how their time was distributed between activities in the categories of mission, people, and administration. In addition, commanders were then asked to provide their ideal time distribution among those three activity categories. The purpose was to gain broad insight into how much the commanders felt they were able to focus on mission and people in light of their administrative burden.

The object of the third section was to hone in on more specific activities and their impact on commander's time. Commanders were asked to identify the activities that consumed the majority of their time. To limit the scope of this exercise, a list of nine activities were provided and commanders were asked to rank them from #1 to #9, with #1 consuming the most time and #9 consuming the least time. The break out of commander responsibilities in AU-2 was used as a loose framework from which to build this list. The activities included: mission training and execution; strategic/long term planning; "leadership by walking around"; standards and discipline; Airmen and family assistance; leading/developing Airmen; meetings; commander programs oversight; and administrative functions/IT tools management. As previously discussed, the complexity of the commander's job could easily lead to a more detailed list of specific activities, but it was necessary to structure this task to receive any useful bounded data.

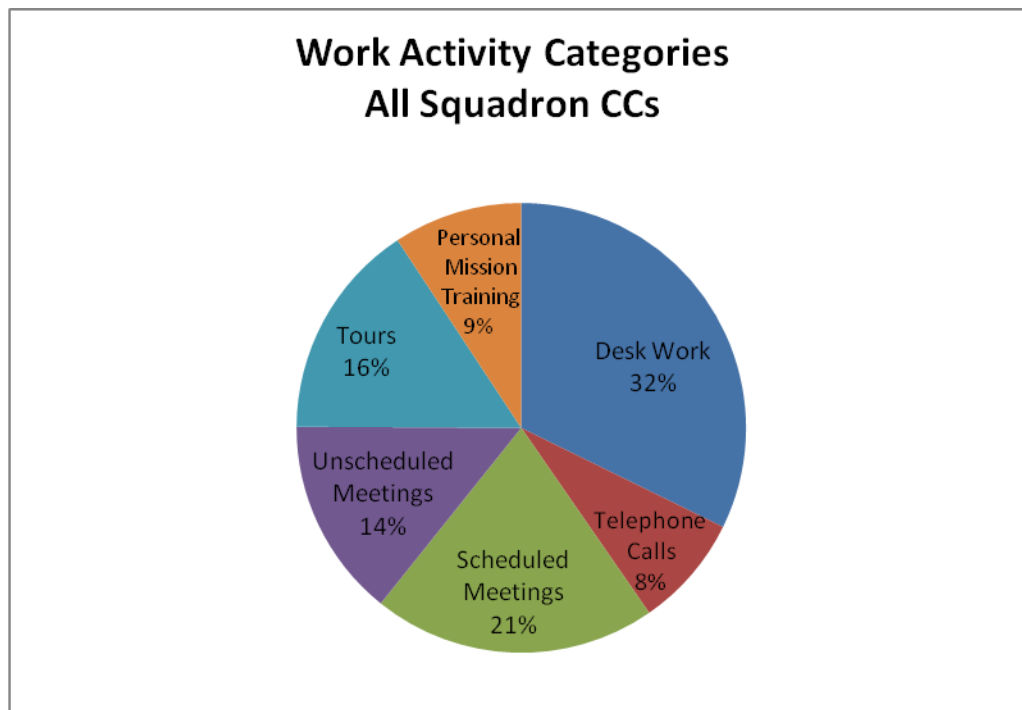
One minor additional section asked commanders directly if the consolidation of support functions had forced them to personally take on administrative tasks or to use personnel "out of

hide” to perform non-mission related duties. Commanders were also offered the opportunity to make any comments concerning issues related to commander’s time.

## Analysis

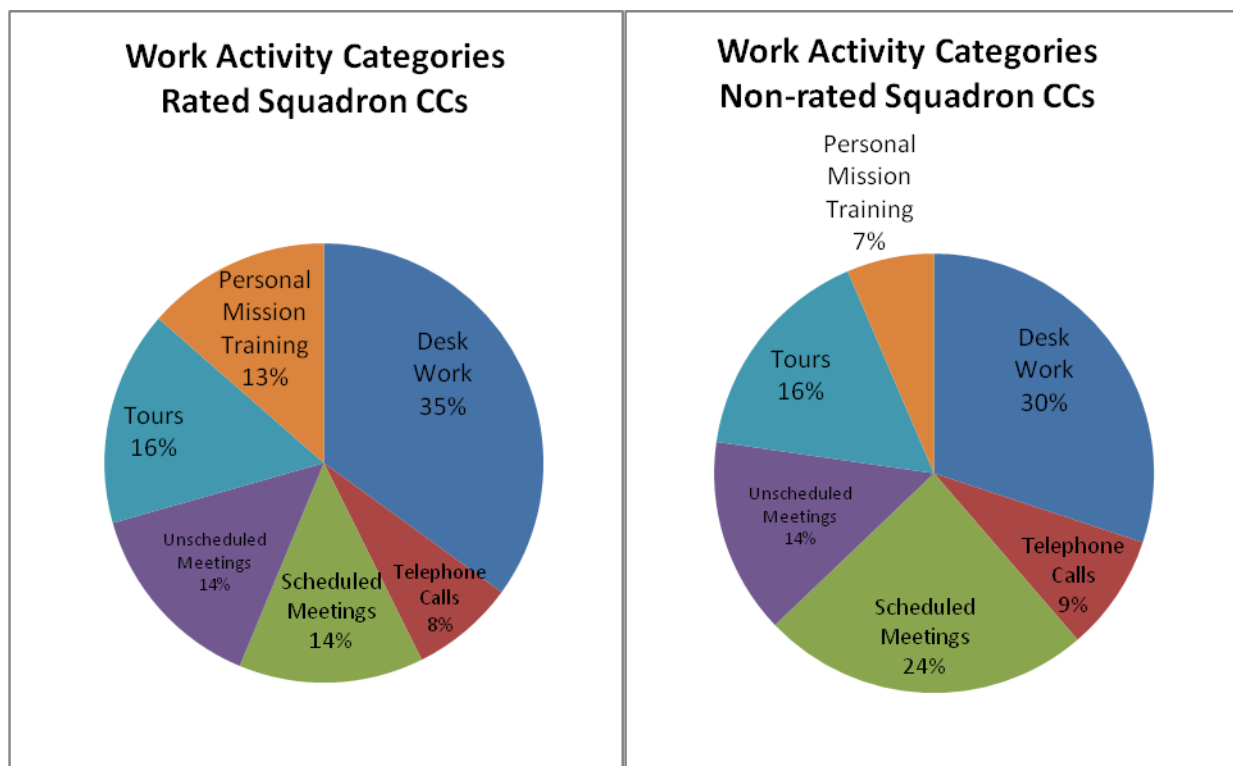
While the scope of the survey was limited, the results provide several useful perspectives on the impact of administrative burden on the commander’s time. Of the 105 commanders contacted, 69 completed the survey. An analysis was conducted to determine if any of the variables (squadron size, work hours, operations vs. support squadron, etc.) had a significant impact on the data collected. While there was quite a bit of variation in the responses, it was determined to be random and not variable-specific. However, for the reader’s interest, some results are presented with a breakout based on variables.

Figure 4 presents the results of the portion of the survey mirroring Mintzberg’s work:

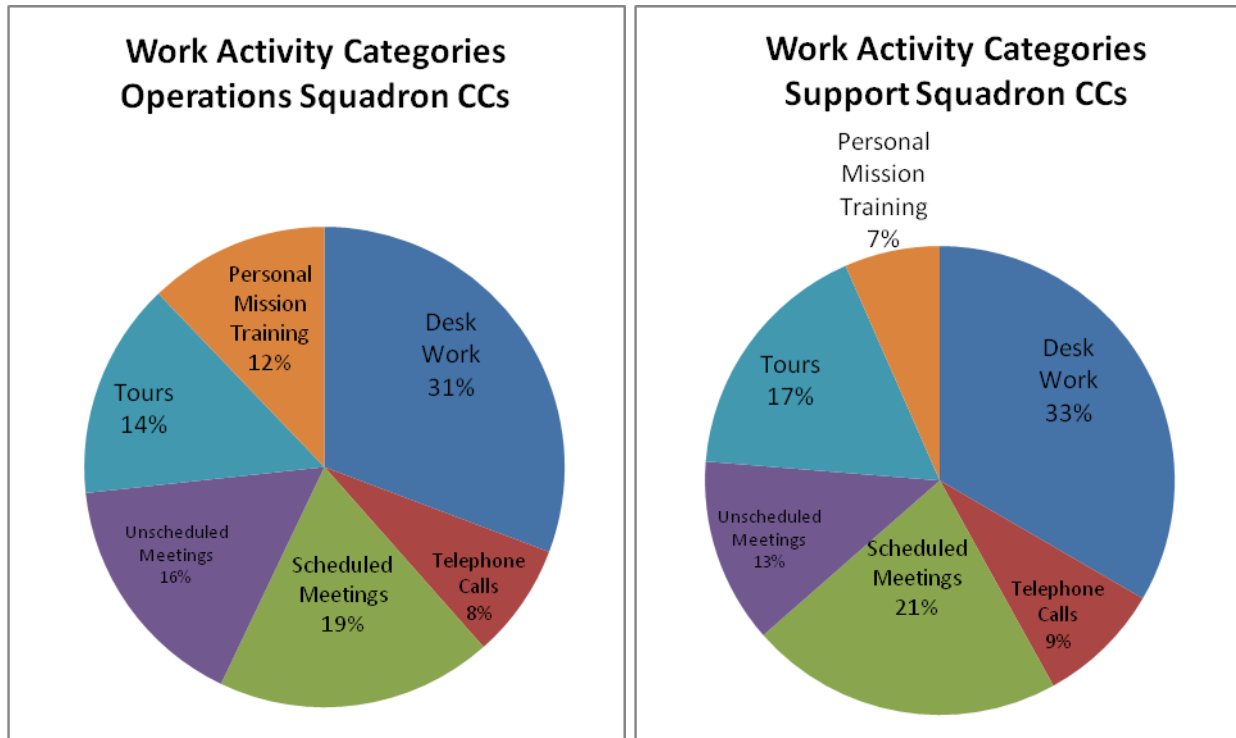


**Figure 4: Commanders’ Time Distribution Time within Work Activity Categories – All Commanders**

The commanders responded almost one-third of their time was spent doing desk work, while over half of their time was spent in the office or in scheduled meetings. 16 percent of their time was spent touring, significantly more than the 3 percent for Mintzberg's CEOs. While there is quite a disparity with Mintzberg's results, that can be expected because his CEOs operated at the strategic level. Interestingly, the commanders' results are very similar to those in Choran's study of small companies, which helps add credence to their validity. For the reader's interest, comparisons of rated vs. non-rated commanders and operations squadron vs. support squadron commanders are presented in Figures 5 and 6 respectively:

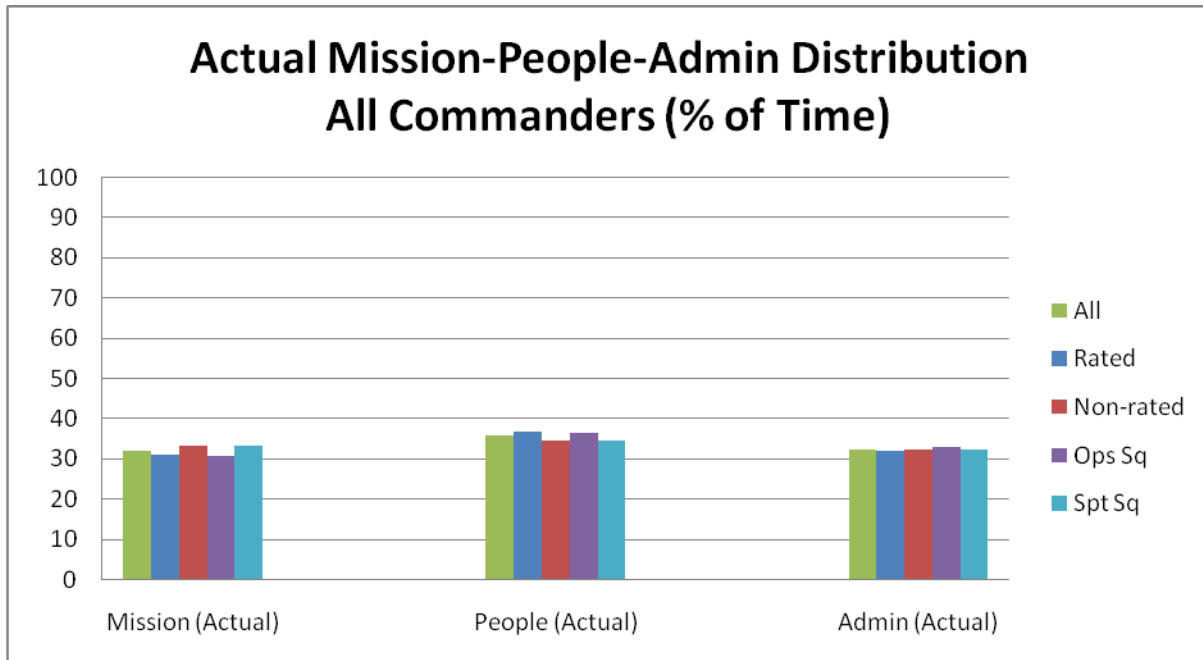


**Figure 5: Commanders' Time Distribution Time within Work Activity Categories – Rated vs. Non-rated Commanders**



**Figure 6: Commanders' Time Distribution Time within Work Activity Categories – Operations vs. Support Squadrons**

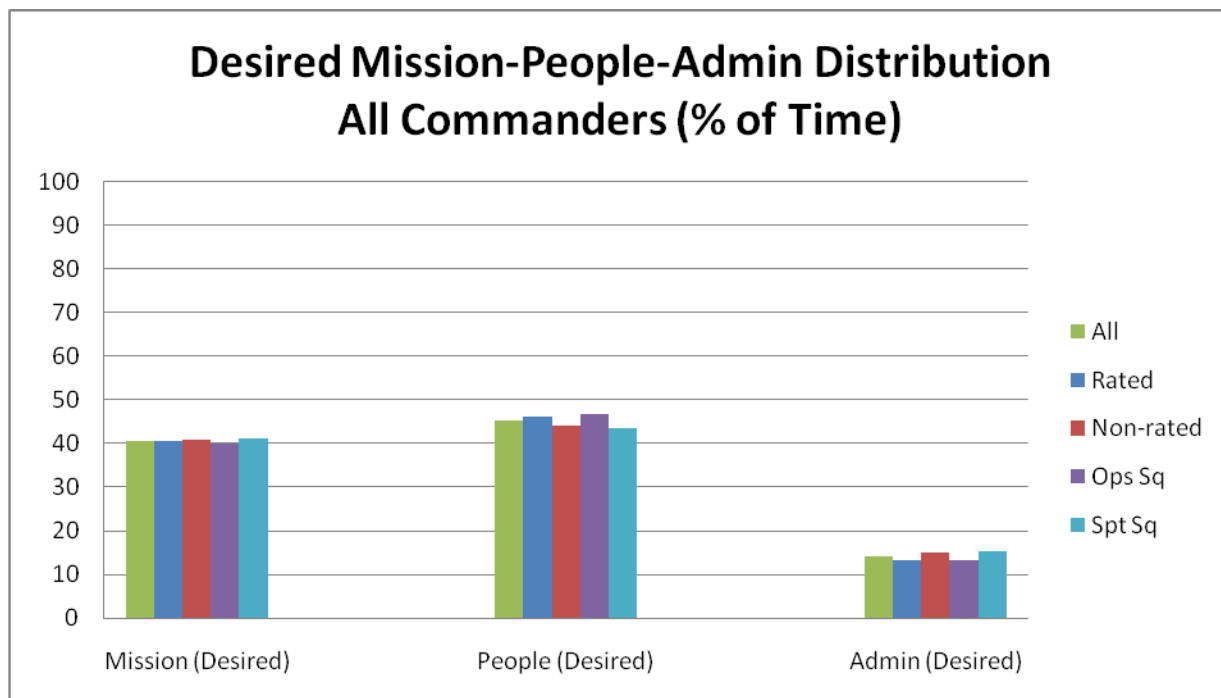
When one considers the distribution among mission, people, and administration, it appears from the commanders' perspective their time is split almost evenly between the three, with approximately one-third in each category. The results for all commanders combined are presented (along with a comparison to several variables) in Figure 7:



**Figure 7: Commanders' Actual Time Distribution among the Categories of Mission, People, and Administration.**

However, based on their responses, commanders felt this picture should be significantly different. They believed the amount of time they spent on administration should be cut by more than half, from 32 percent to 14 percent. They think 41 percent of their time should be afforded to the mission, while 45 percent should be focused on people. The results for all commanders combined are presented (along with a comparison to several variables) in Figure 8:

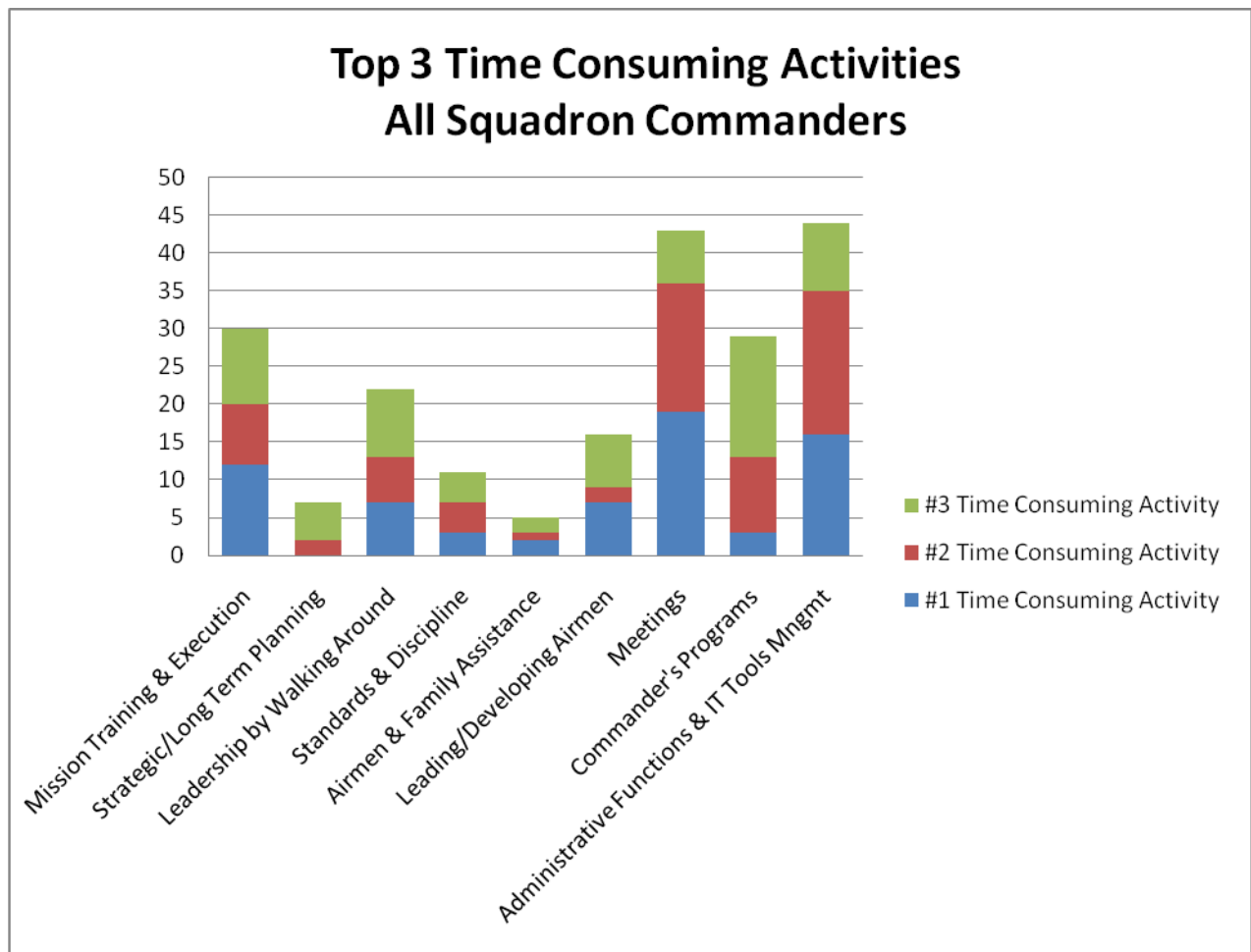




**Figure 8: Commanders' Desired Time Distribution among the Categories of Mission, People, and Administration.**

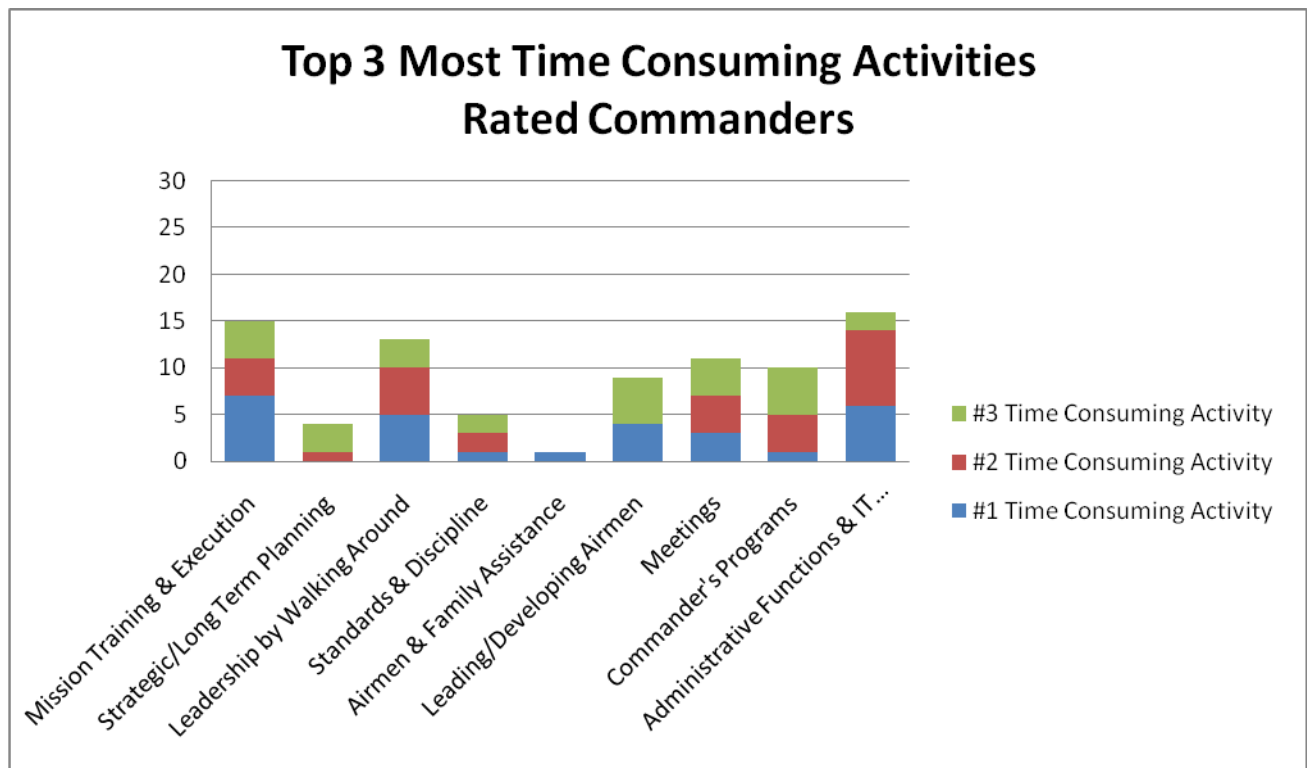
In judging these results, one must consider activities that fall within each category are subject to interpretation by the individual commander. Plus, there is probably overlap of activities between different categories (e.g., tracking of performance reports could be considered administration, while writing them could be considered taking care of people). But at the very least, this exercise provides the commanders' perspective of where they believe their attention is focused.

The most telling results are commanders' rankings of time consuming activities. Their responses clearly show administrative functions (administration/IT tools, commander's programs, meetings) take the most time. Administrative functions and IT tools management were ranked in the top three most often by commanders, with meetings following closely behind. Results are presented in Figure 9:

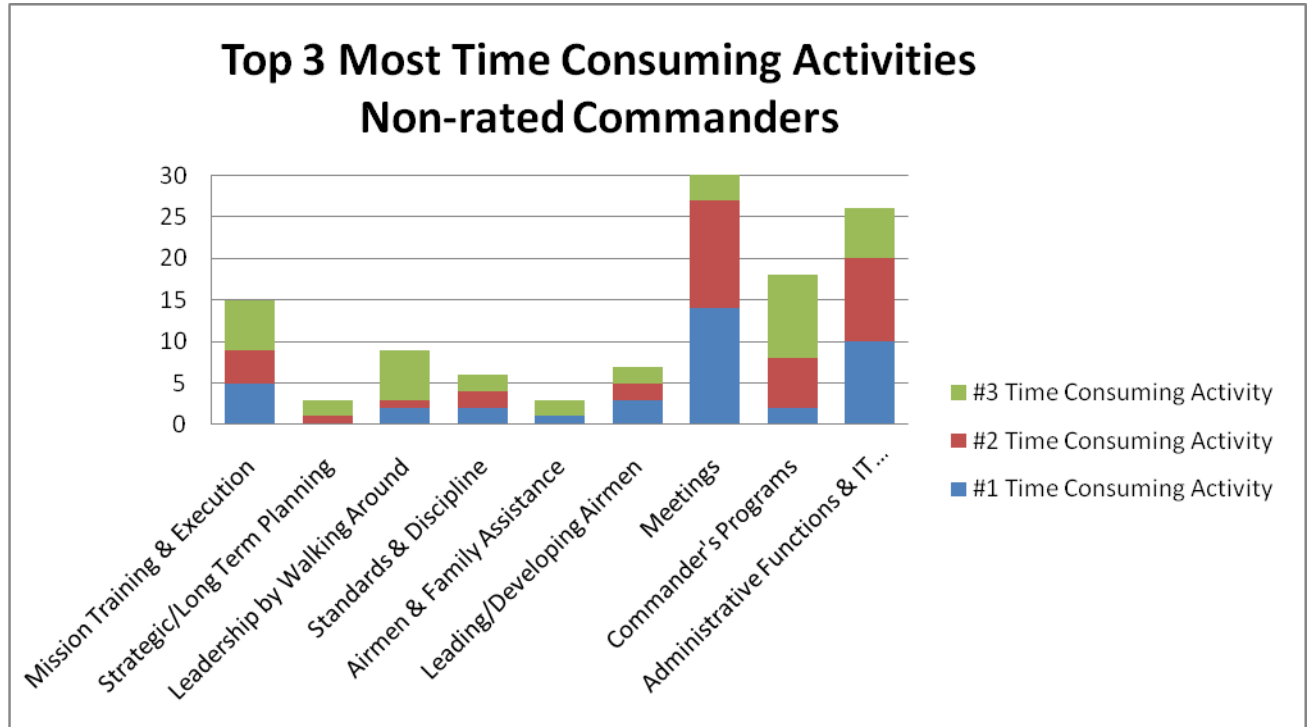


**Figure 9: Commanders' Most Time Consuming Activities Ranked #1, #2, or #3**

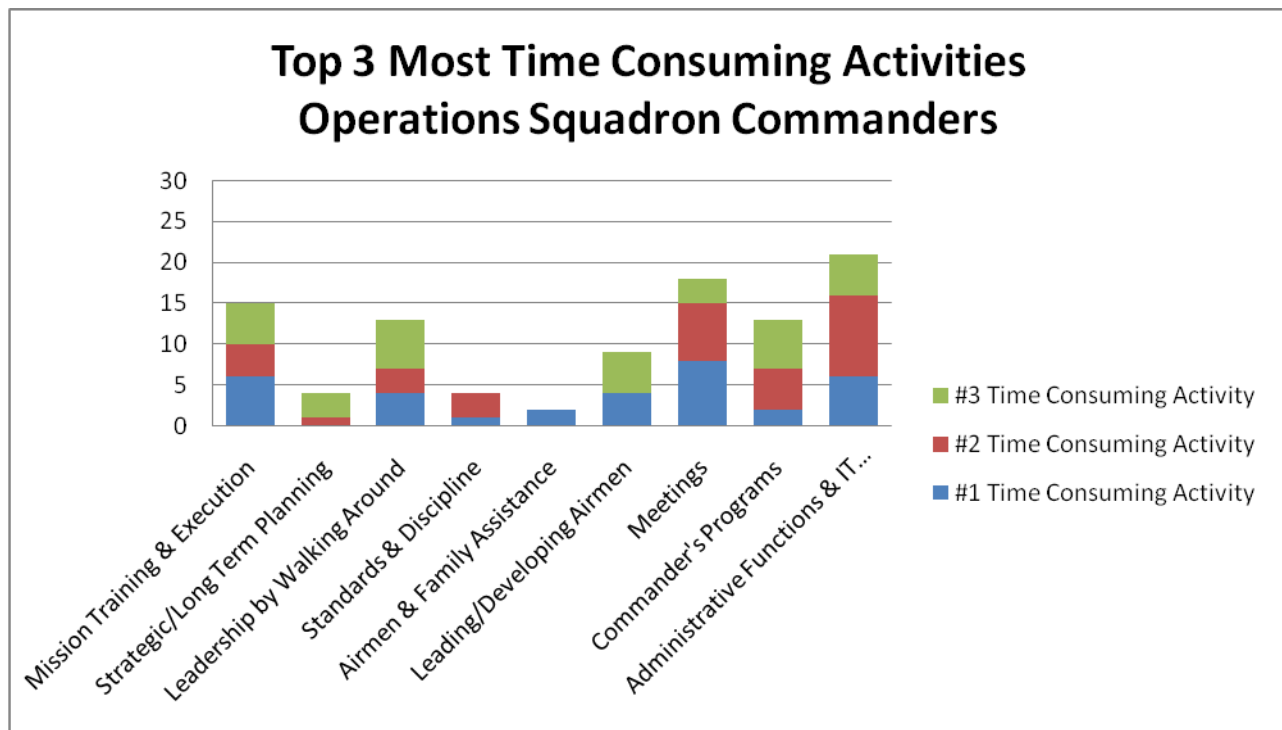
There was some difference between the responses of rated vs. non-rated commanders and operations vs. support squadron commanders. The most significant variation was that nonrated commanders spent almost twice as much time on the administrative functions than their rated counterparts. These results are presented in Figures 10 through 13:



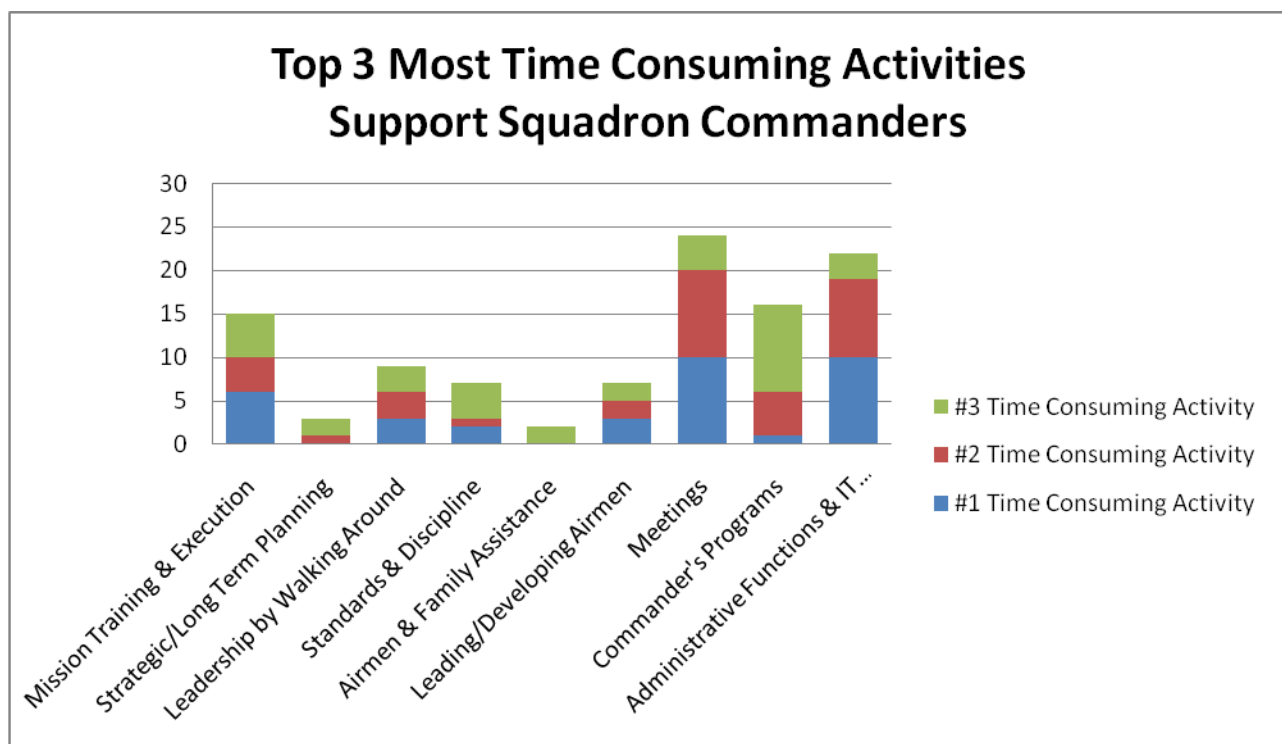
**Figure 10: Rated Commanders' Most Time Consuming Activities Ranked #1, #2, or #3**



**Figure 11: Non-rated Commanders' Most Time Consuming Activities Ranked #1, #2, or #3**



**Figure 12: Operations Squadron Commanders' Most Time Consuming Activities Ranked #1, #2, or #3**



**Figure 13: Support Squadron Commanders' Most Time Consuming Activities Ranked #1, #2, or #3**

Over 75 percent of commanders responded they personally assumed administrative tasks due to consolidation of support personnel outside the squadron, and on average these tasks consumed 19 percent of their time. In addition, over 82 percent had to use personnel “out of hide” to perform non-mission related duties. Many of the commanders lamented the administrative burden in no uncertain terms:

“ I have commanded three squadrons in the past ten years. During this time I watched first hand the amount of time I spent on administrative requirements double and at times triple.”

“Squadron commanders may be becoming more of an administrator than a commander.”

“I felt like an action officer on G-series orders...not like a commander.”

“We have become a culture which values administrative competence over developing leaders/warriors.”

While these statements are anecdotal, they add to the collection of evidence the commanders’ administrative burden is taking away from their ability to focus on mission and people. The Air Force must takes steps to reverse this trend.

## **Recommendations**

As evidenced by the Airmen’s Time Assessments (ATAs), the Air Force is aware of the problem and is considering actions to improve the situation. For example, 1,200 civilian Unit Program Coordinator authorizations are planned for FY10 to partially make up for the loss of CSS in larger squadrons.<sup>41</sup> More manpower will help, but another root cause of the problem is the sheer amount of administrative requirements on squadrons and commanders; more must be done along those lines. Two recommendations are provided here.

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<sup>41</sup> 2009 Airmen’s Time Assessment (ATA) After Action Report, 1.

## Structured Observation Study

The 2009 ATA report recommends a manpower study to determine the CSS workload left behind following consolidation of those functions.<sup>42</sup> However, the Air Force should conduct a structured observation study of squadron commanders to unequivocally determine the activities consuming their time. The most cost effective way to alleviate the commander's time problem is to reduce unnecessary requirements versus adding manpower to perform tasks that add no value to accomplishing the mission or taking care of people.

While surveys are a valuable tool to provide perspective, they are dependent on the estimating skills of individual respondents. A structured observation study would provide detailed systematic data on every activity a commander performs as well as the types of information they process, and is the only method that offers true accountability for time. This information would prove beneficial for several uses. It could identify activities that should be eliminated altogether. If not eliminated, some activities could be targeted for value stream analysis to lean out underlying processes. In addition, as the Air Force continues to move towards IT solutions, these data would prove invaluable for designing and implementing systems that actually meet commanders' needs.

The Air Force Manpower Agency Performance Management Branch (AFMA/MAPP) should be the office of primary responsibility (OPR) for this study with the AFMA Management Engineering Branch and AF/A1X in support. AFMA/MAPP personnel psychologists have the academic credentials to conduct such a study and could use Mintzberg's work as a basis to design it. AFMA/MAPP would need to determine a representative group of commanders to study across missions, major commands, and Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) to ensure

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<sup>42</sup> 2009 *Airmen's Time Assessment (ATA) After Action Report*, 6.

proper breadth and depth. The study would be time and resource intensive, but the outcome could benefit all future commanders and their squadrons.

### **Squadron Commander Advocate**

The squadron commander needs an advocate at the highest levels of the Air Force. There appears to be no protection of commanders from the impact of stovepipe functional initiatives. The Air Force is taking a step to alleviate this problem. Air Force Instruction (AFI) 38-206 is currently under development and will establish a “gatekeeper” process to vet and approve new additional duty requirements to ensure any workload levied at the unit level is appropriate.<sup>43</sup> But no timetable is available for the AFI’s publication.

While any reduction in additional duties would help, many initiatives are implemented apparently without regard for second- and third-order effects on commanders. Any number of actions can directly impact commanders’ time: manpower reductions under PBD 720, changes to the assignment or evaluation systems, and new travel order and voucher processing systems are just a few examples. Some actions are unavoidable, but senior leadership must be aware of the consequences their decisions have on the commander’s ability to accomplish the mission while taking care of people.

The Air Force should create a council of squadron commanders that can vet Air Force initiatives prior to design and implementation to provide senior leaders perspective on the impact at the grass roots level. The Vice CSAF (VCSAF) should be designated as the squadron commander’s advocate and OPR for the council. The council would consist of 12-20 sitting and recently graduated squadron commanders from an appropriate mix of missions, major commands, and AFSCs that would be rotated annually. The council could meet 2-4 times a year either in person or via video teleconferences. While these duties would add a burden to those on

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<sup>43</sup> 2009 *Airmen’s Time Assessment (ATA) After Action Report*, 10.

the council, the results could ultimately benefit all commanders, and the VCSAF would provide an advocate at the highest levels to guard against attempts to usurp commanders' time.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, everything falls on the commander's head. That is not in dispute, and few who have served on G-series orders would have it any other way. Is it possible to say how much of an administrative burden is too much? No—every situation is different and every commander is unique. Commanders will continue to make the mission happen because of their dedication to their people and the organization, but that does not mean the Air Force should not do its best to make things better.

Based on this study one can conclude commanders believe their administrative burden must be reduced. Air Force doctrine and guidance calls for commanders to focus on mission and people, but manning cuts due to PBD 720 and stovepipe functional initiatives relying on IT solutions have made that more difficult than ever. The results of AF/A1X's ATAs and this study's Commander's Time Survey clearly show the administrative burden is out of alignment with Air Force expectations on where commanders should direct their efforts. The Air Force should continue to study the problem and provide an advocate to defend the commander's interests.

In this resource-constrained environment, leadership makes the difference in a squadron that is just getting by and one that is thriving. But as the Schlesinger report states, "The Air Force owes its commanders sufficient and effective manning—accountability in the absence of appropriate resourcing undermines success."<sup>44</sup> The Air Force must give its commanders a

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<sup>44</sup> James R. Schlesinger, et al, *Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management*, 42.



fighting chance by reducing the overwhelming administrative burden, allowing them the opportunity to lead by protecting their most precious commodity—time.

# Appendix A

## Commander's Time Survey

AU SCN 09-050, expires 27 Oct 10

The perception of squadron command tends to highlight the classical view of the commander's role as a leader. However, there is also a significant administrative burden with which a commander must contend. The purpose of this survey is to collect data about the activities that actually consume an Air Force squadron commander's time. **Please respond to these questions from the timeframe during which you were a squadron commander:**

Rank <input type="radio"/> Lt <input type="radio"/> Capt <input type="radio"/> Maj <input type="radio"/> Lt Col <input type="radio"/> Colonel	Rated or Support <input type="radio"/> Rated <input type="radio"/> Support	Career Speciality (Ex: Space, Security Forces, Mobility Pilot, etc.)	When did you take command? (month/year)	When did you relinquish command? (month/year)
Squadron Type <input type="radio"/> Operations <input type="radio"/> Support	Squadron Mission (fEx: Fighter Squadron, Logistics Readiness Squadron, etc.)	Squadron Size <input type="text"/>	MAJCOM <input type="text"/>	Location <input type="radio"/> CONUS <input type="radio"/> Overseas

In answering these questions, please do so from the perspective of a typical or average work week in garrison (i.e.; not in the deployed environment).

As a commander, how many hours did you work in a typical week?

For the following categories, please indicate the percentage of your time you spent on these activities during a typical week as a squadron commander:	Percent of Time (must equal 100%)
Desk Work (Any in office activities such as e-mail, computer work, paperwork, staff work, etc.)	
Telephone Calls (Any time spent on the phone dealing with work/squadron related issues. Examples: business-related calls.)	
Scheduled Meetings (Any scheduled meetings or formal events. Examples: internal/external staff meetings, ceremonial events such as commander's calls or retirements, counseling/mentoring sessions, etc.)	
Unscheduled Meetings (Impromptu events that occur at random that result in face-to-face communication. Examples: the operation officer dropping by to discuss an issue; going to see the first sergeant or a flight commander to ask a question, etc.)	
Tours (Randomly observing squadron activities without prearrangement. Examples: dropping by a workshop unannounced; "leadership by walking around")	
Personnel Mission Specific Training Duties (Any personal AFSC related, mission specific training required to maintain mission capabilities/currencies. Example: rated squadron commander flying to meet training or currency requirements in an aircraft)	
<b>Total 0</b>	

For the following categories, please indicate the percentage of your time as a squadron commander you spent on these activity categories during a typical week:	Percent of Time (must equal 100%)
Mission	
People	
Administration	
<b>Total 0</b>	

For the same categories, please indicate the percentage of time in each activity category you believe would be the ideal distribution for a squadron commander to spend in each activity category during a typical week:	Percent of Time (must equal 100%)
Mission	
People	
Administration	
<b>Total 0</b>	

For the following commander activities, please rank order from #1 through #9, which activities consumed the majority of your time during a typical week (with #1 consuming the most time and #9 consuming the least time):

<input type="text"/>	Mission Training and Execution
<input type="text"/>	Strategic/Long Term Planning
<input type="text"/>	"Leadership by Walking Around"
<input type="text"/>	Standard and Discipline
<input type="text"/>	Airmen and Family Assistance
<input type="text"/>	Leading/Developing Airman
<input type="text"/>	Meetings
<input type="text"/>	Commander Programs Oversight
<input type="text"/>	Administrative Functions and Information Technology Tools Management

As a squadron commander, did you personally have to perform administrative tasks that you believe should have been performed by support personnel (i.e., Commander's Support Staff, First Sergeant, etc.) that were unavailable because they were consolidated outside of the squadron?

☐ Yes

☐ No

As a squadron commander, did you have to task your personnel to perform non-mission related duties that were supposed to be performed by support functions (i.e. Commander's Support Staff, First Sergeant, etc.) that were consolidated outside of the squadron?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please indicate the level at which the following support functions were available to you as a squadron commander:	Squadron	Group	Not available	Used squadron member ("out of hide")
Commander Support Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
First Sergeant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Secretary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unit Training Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Computer Systems Administrator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unit Fitness Program Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Records Custodian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Security Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resource Advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have any comments concerning issues or activities that consume a squadron commander's time?

Thank you for completing the Commander's Time Survey. When you click on the Finish button you will be taken to the AU webpage.

Finish

Save

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